



SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES
SALESIAN HEADQUARTERS

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The Rector Major

FINAL ADDRESS

Dear confreres,

We have come to the end of this experience of the 29th General Chapter with hearts filled with joy and gratitude for all that we have been able to experience, share and plan. The gift of the presence of the Spirit of God that we have prayed for daily in morning prayer as well as during our work through conversation in the Spirit, has been the central strength of the General Chapter experience. We asked that the Spirit play a leading role, and this has been given to us abundantly.

The celebration of any General Chapter is like a milestone in the life of every religious congregation. This also applies to us, to our beloved Salesian Congregation. It is a moment that gives continuity to the journey from Valdocco that continues to be experienced with commitment and carried forward with zeal and determination in various parts of the world.

We have come to the end of this General Chapter with the approval of a Final Document that will serve as a chart to navigate the next six years – 2025-2031. We will see and feel the value of this Final Document to the extent that we are able to maintain the same dedication to listening, the same care to letting ourselves be accompanied by the Holy Spirit who has marked these weeks, once this Salesian Pentecost experience has concluded.

Since the beginning, when the Rector Major Fr Angel Fernández Arttime made the *Letter of Convocation of the 29th General Chapter* public on 24 September 2023, in **AGC 441**, the motivations that were to guide the Pre-Chapter work were clear and subsequently, the work of the General Chapter itself. The Rector Major wrote that,

The chosen theme is the result of a rich and profound reflection that we have carried out in the General Council on the basis of the answers received from the Provinces and the vision that we have of the Congregation at this time. We were pleasantly surprised by the great convergence and harmony we found in the many

contributions from the Provinces, which had a lot to do with the reality we see in the Congregation, with the path of fidelity that exists in many sectors and also with present challenges. (AGC 441)

The process of listening to the provinces that led to the identification of the theme for this General Chapter is already a clear indication of a listening methodology. In light of what we have experienced in recent weeks, the value of the listening process is confirmed. The way in which we first identified and then interpreted the challenges that the Congregation is determined to face has highlighted our typical Salesian atmosphere, a family spirit which does not seek to avoid challenges, which does not try to standardise thinking, but which does everything possible to arrive at that spirit of communion where each of us can recognise the way to be Don Bosco today.

The focal point of the challenges identified has to do with the fact that “it refers to the centrality of God (as Trinity) and Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives, without ever forgetting young people and our commitment to them” (ACG 441). The way the General Chapter developed testifies not only to the fact that we have the ability to identify challenges but that we have also found ways to bring out agreement and unity, recognising and treasuring the fact that we are in different continents and contexts, different cultures and languages. What is more, this atmosphere confirms that when we look at reality with Don Bosco’s eyes and hear today, when we are truly passionate about Christ and dedicated to young people, then we discover that this diversity becomes a wealth, that journeying together is beautiful even if it is tiring, that together we can face challenges.

In a world fragmented by wars, conflicts and depersonalising ideologies; in a world marked by economic and political thinking and models that remove the active role that young people can play, our presence is a sign, a “sacrament” of hope. Young people, regardless of skin colour, religious or ethnic affiliation, ask us to put forward proposals and places of hope. They are the sons and daughters of God who expect us to be humble servants.

A second point that was confirmed and reaffirmed by this General Chapter is the shared conviction that “if fidelity and prophecy were lacking in our Congregation, we would be like the light that does not shine and the salt that does not give flavour” (AGC 441). The point here is not so much whether we want to be more authentic or not, but the very fact that this is the only path we have and it is the one that has been strongly reiterated here over these weeks: to grow in authenticity!

The courage shown during some moments of the General Chapter is an excellent premise for the courage that will be asked of us in the future on other issues that came out of this General Chapter. I am sure that this courage here has found fertile ground, a healthy and promising ecosystem that holds great promise for the future. Having courage means not letting fear have the last word. The parable of the talents clearly teaches us this. The Lord has given us only one talent: the Salesian charism, concentrated in the Preventive System. Each of us will be asked what we have done with this talent. Together, we are called to make it bear fruit in challenging, new and unprecedented contexts. We have no

reason to bury it. We have so many reasons, so many cries from young people who urge us to “go out” to sow hope. Don Bosco already experienced this courageous step, filled with conviction, in his time, and today he asks us to experience it like he did and with him.

I would like to comment on some points that are already found in the **Final Document** and which I believe can serve as pointers to encourage us on the journey over the next six years.

1. Personal conversion

Our journey as a Salesian Congregation depends on the personal, intimate and profound choices that each of us decides to make. Broadening the background against which we need to reflect on the theme of personal conversion, it is important to remember how, over these years after the Second Vatican Council, the Congregation has embarked on a journey of spiritual, charismatic and pastoral reflection that has been masterfully commented on by Fr Pascual in his weekly talks. This interpretation and contribution further enriches the important reflection that the Rector Major Fr Egidio Viganó left us in his last letter to the Congregation: *Reading the Founder’s Charism at the Present Day* (AGC 352, 1995). If today we talk about a “change of era”, Fr Viganó wrote in 1995:

The reinterpretation of our Founder’s charism has kept us busy for the last thirty years, And in our task we have been helped by two great beacons of light: the first is the Second Vatican Council, and the second the epoch-making acceleration of history at the present time.” (AGC 352, 1995).

I am referring to this journey of the Congregation with its riches and heritage because the matter of personal conversion is the space where this journey of the Congregation finds its confirmation and further impetus. Personal conversion is not an intimate, self-referential affair. This is not a call that only touches me in a way that is detached from everything and everyone. Personal conversion is that special experience from which a renewed pastoral care will emerge. We can see the Congregation’s journey because it finds its starting point in the heart of each one of us. It is from here that we can notice the continuous and convinced pastoral renewal. Pope Francis condenses this urgent cry in a single sentence: : “The Church’s closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; ‘ communion and mission are profoundly interconnected”¹ (*Evangelii Gaudium* 23).

This leads us to discover that when we are insisting on personal conversion we must be careful not to fall into an intimist interpretation of spiritual experience on the one hand, and, not underestimating what is the foundation of every pastoral journey on the other.

¹ *Christifideles laici* no.32

In this call of renewed passion for Jesus, I invite every Salesian and every community to take the concrete choices and commitments that as a General Chapter we believed to be urgent for a more authentic educative and pastoral witness seriously. We believe that we cannot grow pastorally without this attitude of listening to the Word of God. We recognise that the various pastoral commitments we have, the ever-increasing needs that confront us and that testify to unceasing poverty, risk taking away the necessary time to "be with him." We already find this challenge at the very beginning of our Congregation. It is about having clear priorities that strengthen our spiritual and charismatic backbone that gives soul and credibility to our mission

Fr Alberto Caviglia, when commenting on the topic of "Salesian Spirituality" in his *Conferences on the Salesian Spirit* writes:

What was most astonishing for those who studied Don Bosco during hte canonisation process was the discovery of his incredible work of building the inner man.

Cardinal Salotti... in reference to the study he was then engaged in, told the Holy Father that "in studying the voluminous Turin processes, more than the external grandeur of his colossal work, [he] was struck by the inner life of the spirit, from which the whole prodigious apostolate of Ven. Don Bosco originated and was nourished."

Many are only familiar with the external work that seems so impressive, but are largely ignorant of the wise, sublime edifice of Christian perfection that he had patiently erected in his soul by practising the virtue of his state every day, every hour.

Dear brothers, here we have our Don Bosco. It is this Don Bosco that we are called to discover today:

We study and imitate him, admiring in him a splendid blending of nature and grace. He was deeply human, rich in the qualities of his people, open to the realities of this earth; and he was just as deeply the man of God, filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and living "as though he saw him who is invisible."

These two aspects combined to create a closely-knit life project, the service of the young. He realized his aim with firmness, constancy and the sensitivity of a generous heart, in the midst of difficulties and fatigue. "He took no step, he said no word, he took up no task that was not directed to the saving of the young... Truly the only concern of his heart was for souls" (C 21).

I would like to recall here an invitation from Mother Teresa to her sisters a few years before her death. Her dedication and that of her sisters to the poor is known to everyone. However, it is good for us to hear these words of hers written to her sisters: However, it is good for us to listen to these words of hers written to her sisters:

Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your heart, you will not be able to hear him say “I am thirsty” in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this intimate and daily contact with Jesus as a living and real person, not just as an idea.²

Only by listening in the depths of our hearts to those who call us to follow him, Jesus Christ, can we truly listen with an authentic heart to those who call us to serve them. If the radical motivation of our being servants does not find its roots in the person of Christ, the alternative is that our motivations are nourished by the soil of our ego. And the consequence is that then our own pastoral action ends up inflating the same ego. The urgency of recovering the mystical space, the sacred ground of the encounter with God, a ground in which we have to take off the sandals of our certainties and our ways of interpreting reality with its challenges over these weeks, has been repeated many times and in various ways.

Dear brothers, here we have the first step. Here we give proof if we really want to be authentic sons of Don Bosco. Here we prove if we really love and imitate Don Bosco.

2. Getting to know Don Bosco not only loving Don Bosco

We are aware that one of the central challenges we have as Salesians is to communicate the good news through our witness and through our educative and pastoral proposals in a culture that is undergoing radical change. While in the West we talk about the indifference to religious proposal that is the result of the challenge of secularisation, we notice how the challenge takes other forms in other continents, first of all in the shift towards a globalised culture that radically shifts the scale of values and lifestyles. In a fluid and hyper-connected world, what we knew yesterday has radically changed today: in short, we are dealing here with the oft-mentioned question of the change of epoch.

With this change affects every area, it is positive to see how, since the SCG (1972), the Congregation has been on a continuous journey, until today, rethinking and reflecting on its educative and pastoral proposal. It is a process that responds to the question “what would Don Bosco do today, in a secularised and globalised culture like ours?”

Throughout this process we recognise how, from its very origins, the beauty and strength of the Salesian charism lies precisely in its inner capacity to dialogue with the history of the young people we are called to encounter in every age. What we have been contemplating at Valdocco, in this Salesian holy land, is the breath of the Spirit that guided Don Bosco and that we recognise as continuing to guide us today. The *Constitutions* begin precisely with this foundational and fundamental certainty:

²“Until you can hear Jesus in the silence of your own heart, you will not be able to hear Him saying, “I thirst” in the hearts of the poor. Never give up this daily intimate contact with Jesus as the real living person – not just the idea”, in <https://catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/the-fulfillment-jesus-wants-for-us.html>

“Through the motherly intervention of Mary, the Holy Spirit raised up St John Bosco to contribute to the salvation of youth ...

The Spirit formed within him the heart of a father and teacher, capable of total self-giving. “I have promised God that until my dying breath I would dedicate myself entirely to my poor boys.”

To ensure the continuation of this mission, the Spirit inspired him to initiate various apostolic endeavours, first among them our Society.

The Church has acknowledged God’s hand in this, especially by approving our Constitutions and by proclaiming our Founder a saint.

From this active presence of the Holy Spirit we draw strength for our fidelity and support for our hope. (C 1).

The Salesian charism contains an innate invitation to place ourselves before young people in the same way that Don Bosco placed himself before Bartholomew Garelli... “his friend”!

All this sounds very easy to say, and it comes across as a friendly exhortation. In reality, it conceals within itself an urgent invitation to us, the sons of Don Bosco, to represent the Salesian charism in a suitable and meaningful way in today’s world, wherever we may find ourselves. However, there is an essential condition that allows us to undertake this journey: a true and profound knowledge of Don Bosco. We cannot say that we truly “love” Don Bosco if we are not seriously committed to “knowing” Don Bosco.

Often the risk is to settle with a knowledge of Don Bosco that fails to connect with current challenges. With a superficial knowledge of Don Bosco, we are really poor in the charismatic baggage that makes us his authentic sons. Without knowing Don Bosco, we cannot and do not end up embodying Don Bosco in the cultures where we are. All our efforts in this poverty of charismatic knowledge results only in charismatic cosmetic operations, which in the end are a betrayal of Don Bosco’s very legacy.

If we want the Salesian charism to be capable of engaging in dialogue with today’s culture, today’s cultures, we must continually deepen our understanding of it, both in itself and in light of the ever-changing conditions in which we live. The foundation we received at the beginning of our initial formation, if not seriously deepened today, is not sufficient - it is simply useless if not even harmful.

In this direction, the Congregation has made, and continues to make, a tremendous effort to reread the life of Don Bosco and the Salesian charism in light of the current social and cultural conditions throughout the world. It is a legacy we have, but we run the risk of not knowing it because we fail to study it as it deserves. The loss of memory risks not only makes us lose touch with the treasure we have, but also risks making us believe that this treasure does not exist. And this would be really tragic not so much and only for us Salesians, but for those crowds of young people who are waiting for us.

The urgency of this deeper understanding is not merely intellectual in nature, but responds to the thirst that exists for a serious charismatic formation of the laity in our Educative and Pastoral Communities (EPCs). The Final Document deals with this issue often and systematically. The lay people who today share in the Salesian mission with us are individuals eager for a clearer and more meaningfully Salesian formation proposal. We cannot truly experience these spaces of educational and pastoral convergence if our language and the way we communicate the charism lack the depth of understanding and the proper preparation needed to spark curiosity and capture the attention of those who share the Salesian mission with us.

It is not enough to say that we love Don Bosco. True “love” for Don Bosco implies the commitment to know and study him, not only in the light of his time, but also in the light of the great potential of his relevance in the light of our time. The Rector Major, Fr Pascual Chávez, made an invitation to the entire Congregation and the Salesian Family for the three years that preceded the “Bicentenary of the birth of Don Bosco 1815-2013”.³ It is an invitation that is more relevant than ever. This General Chapter is a call and an opportunity to strengthen the historical, pedagogical, and spiritual knowledge of our Father and Teacher.

We recognise dear brothers, that at this point this issue connects with the previous one – personal conversion. If we do not know Don Bosco and if we do not study him, we cannot understand the dynamics and efforts of his spiritual journey and consequently the roots of his pastoral choices. We end up loving him only superficially, without the true ability to imitate him as a profoundly holy man. Above all, it will be impossible to inculturate his charism today in different contexts and situations. Only by strengthening our charismatic identity will we be able to offer the Church and Society a credible witness and a meaningful and relevant educative and pastoral proposal to young people.

3. The journey continues

In this third part, I would like to encourage the entire Congregation to keep alive the focus on certain areas where, through the various *Resolutions* and concrete commitments, we have sought to give a sign of continuity.

The area of animation and coordination of marginalisation and youth distress has been an area in which the Congregation has been very committed over recent decades. I believe that the response by the provinces to growing poverty is a prophetic sign that sets us apart and finds all of us determined to continue to strengthen the Salesian response for the poorest.

The provinces’ efforts in the area of **promoting safe environments** continue to find a growing and professional response in the provinces. The effort in this area is a

³ (Fr Pascual Chávez, *Srrenna* 2012, “*Let us make the young our life’s mission by coming to know and imitate Don Bosco*” [AGC 412])

testimony that this is the right direction to affirm the commitment to the dignity of all, especially the most vulnerable.

The area of **integral ecology** emerges as a call for greater educative and pastoral work. The growth of attention in educative and pastoral communities to environmental issues requires a systematic commitment to promote a change in mentality. The various proposals for formation in this area found in the Congregation should be acknowledged and accompanied.

There are also two areas that I would like to invite the Congregation to consider carefully for the coming years. They are part of a broader perspective of the Congregation's efforts. I believe these are two areas will have substantial consequences for our educative and pastoral processes.

i. Artificial intelligence – a real mission in an artificial world

As Salesians of Don Bosco, we are called to walk with young people in every environment in which they live and grow, even in the vast and complex digital world. Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents itself as a revolutionary innovation that can shape the way people learn, communicate and build relationships. However, as revolutionary as it may be, AI remains exactly that: artificial. Our ministry, rooted in authentic human connection and guided by the Preventive System, is profoundly *real*. Artificial intelligence can assist us, but it cannot love like we do. It can organise, analyse and teach in new ways, but it can never replace the relational and pastoral touch that defines our Salesian mission.

Don Bosco was a visionary who was not afraid of innovation, both at the ecclesial level and at the educational, cultural and social levels. When this innovation served the good of young people, Don Bosco went ahead with astonishing speed. He took advantage of the press, new educational methods and workshops to lift young people up and prepare them for life. If he were among us today, he would undoubtedly look at AI with a critical and creative eye. He would see it not as an end but as a means, a tool to amplify pastoral effectiveness without losing sight of the human person at the centre.

Artificial Intelligence is not just a tool: it is part of our mission as Salesians living in the digital age. The virtual world is no longer a separate space but an integral part of young people's daily lives. AI can help us respond to their needs more efficiently and creatively, offering personalised learning paths, virtual mentorship, and platforms that foster meaningful connections.

In this sense, artificial intelligence becomes both a *tool* and a *mission*, as it helps us reach young people where they are, often immersed in the digital world. While embracing AI, we need to recognise that it is just one aspect of a larger reality that encompasses social media, virtual communities, digital storytelling, and much more. Together, these elements form a new pastoral frontier that challenges us to be present and proactive. Our mission is not simply to use technology, but to *evangelise the digital world*, bringing the gospel into spaces where it might otherwise be absent.

Our response to AI and digital challenges must be rooted in the Salesian spirit of optimism and proactive engagement. Let us continue to walk with young people, even in the vast digital world, with hearts full of love because they are passionate about Christ and rooted in the charism of Don Bosco. The future is bright when technology is at the service of humanity and when the digital presence is full of authentic Salesian warmth and pastoral commitment. Let us embrace this new challenge, confident that the spirit of Don Bosco will guide us in every new opportunity.

ii. The Pontifical Salesian University

The Pontifical Salesian University (UPS) is the University of the Salesian Congregation, of all of us. It is a structure of great and strategic importance for the Congregation. Its mission is to bring the charism into dialogue with culture, the energy of Don Bosco's educative and pastoral experience with academic research, so as to develop a high-profile formation proposal at the service of the Congregation, the Church and society.

From the outset, our University has played an irreplaceable role in the formation of many confreres for roles of animation and government and still performs this valuable task. In an era characterised by widespread disorientation about the grammar of the human being and the meaning of existence, by the disintegration of the social bond and the fragmentation of religious experience, by international crises and migratory phenomena, a Congregation like ours is urgently called to face the educative and pastoral mission by making use of the solid intellectual resources that are developed within a university.

As Rector Major and as Grand Chancellor of UPS, I would like to reiterate that the two fundamental priorities for the University of the Congregation are *the formation of educators and pastors, Salesians and laity, at the service of young people* and the cultural – historical, pedagogical and theological – deepening of the charism. Around these two pillars, which require interdisciplinary dialogue and intercultural attention, the UPS is called upon to develop its commitment to research, teaching and the passing on of knowledge. I am therefore pleased that in view of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's text on the Preventive System, a serious research project has been launched in collaboration with the FMA's "Auxilium" Faculty to focus on the original inspiration of Don Bosco's educational practice and to examine how it inspires pedagogical and pastoral practices today in different contexts and cultures.

The governance and animation of the Congregation and the Salesian Family will certainly benefit from the cultural work of the University, just as academic study will receive valuable nourishment by maintaining a close connection with the life of the Congregation and its daily service to the poorest youth around the world.

iii. 150 years – the journey continues

We are called to give thanks and praise to God in this jubilee year of hope because during this year we remember the missionary commitment of Don Bosco which arrived at a very significant moment of development in 1875. The reflection that the Vicar of the

Rector Major, Fr Stefano Martoglio, offered us in *Strenna 2025* reminds us of the central theme of the 150th anniversary of Don Bosco's first missionary expedition: *recognising, rethinking* and *relaunching*.

In the light of the 29th General Chapter that we are concluding, it helps us to place this invitation in the six-year period ahead of us. We are called to be *grateful* because "it makes the fatherly nature of every beautiful accomplishment evident. Without recognition, gratitude, there is no capacity to accept."

To gratitude we add the duty to *rethink* our fidelity, because "fidelity involves the ability to change", in obedience towards a vision that comes from God and from interpreting the 'signs of the times... Rethinking, then, becomes a generative act in which faith and life come together; a moment in which to ask ourselves: what do you want to tell us Lord?"

Finally, the courage to *re-launch*, to start over again every day. As we are doing in these days, we look far ahead, "welcoming new challenges, relaunching the mission with hope. (Because the) Mission is to bring the hope of Christ with clear and conscious awareness, linked to faith."

CONCLUSION

At the end of this concluding address I would like to present a reflection by **Tomas HALIK**, taken from his book *The Afternoon of Christianity was* The author, in the last chapter of the book entitled "The Society of the Way", presents **four ecclesiological concepts**.

I believe that these **four ecclesiological concepts can help us to positively interpret the great pastoral opportunities that await us**. I offer this reflection with the understanding that what the author proposes is intimately related to the heart of Salesian charism. It is striking and surprising that the more we venture into a charismatic, pastoral as well as pedagogical and cultural interpretation of the current reality, the more the conviction is confirmed that our charism provides us with a solid basis so that the various processes that we are accompanying find their rightful place in a world where young people are waiting for hope, joy and optimism to be offered to them. It is good that we recognise with great humility but at the same time with a great sense of responsibility how Don Bosco's charism continues to provide guidelines today, not only for us, but for the whole Church.

- i. *Church as the people of God on pilgrimage through history. This image outlines a Church on the move and grappling with incessant change. God moulds the Church throughout history, reveals himself to her through history, and imparts his teachings to her through historical events. God is in history.*⁴

⁴ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (p. 229).

Our call to be educators and pastors consists precisely in walking with the flock in this history, in this constantly changing society. Our **presence in the various “courtyards of people’s lives”** is the sacramental presence of a God who wants to meet those who seek him without knowing it. In this context, “The sacrament of presence” acquires an inestimable value for us because it is intertwined with the historical events of our young people and of all those who turn to us in the various expressions of the Salesian mission – the **COURTYARD** or playground.

- ii. *The ‘school’ is the second vision of the Church – school of life and school of wisdom. We live in an era in which, in the public space of many European countries, neither a traditional religion nor atheism dominates, but rather agnosticism, apathy and religious illiteracy prevail... In this era it is urgently necessary that Christian society is transformed into a ‘school’ following the original ideal of medieval universities, which arose as a community of teachers and pupils, a community of life, prayer and teaching.*⁵

Retracing Don Bosco’s educative and pastoral project from its origins, we discover how this second proposal directly touches the experience we currently offer to our young people: **school and vocational training**. They are educational paths which are an essential tool for giving life to an integral process where culture and faith meet. For us today, this space is an excellent opportunity where we can witness to the good news in the human and fraternal, educational and pastoral encounter with so many people and, above all, with so many children and young people who feel they are accompanied toward a dignified future. The educational experience for us pastors is a lifestyle that communicates wisdom and values in a context that encounters and goes beyond resistance and that dissolves indifference through empathy and closeness. Walking together promotes a space of integral growth inspired by the wisdom and values of the Gospel – the **SCHOOL**.

- iii. *The Church as a field hospital...for too long, face to face with the diseases of society, the Church has limited itself to morality; now it is faced with the task of rediscovering and applying the therapeutic potential of faith. The diagnostic mission should be carried out by the discipline which I have suggested be called kairology – the art of reading and interpreting the signs of the times, the theological hermeneutics of the facts of society and culture. Kairology should devote its attention to times of crisis and changing cultural paradigms. It should see them as part of a ‘pedagogy of God’, as the opportune time to deepen the reflection on the faith and renew its practice. In a certain sense, kairology develops the method of spiritual discernment, which is an important component of the spirituality of Saint Ignatius and his disciples; it applies this method when it delves into and evaluates the current state of the world and our tasks within it.*⁶

⁵ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (pp. 231-232).

⁶ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (pp. 233-234).

This third ecclesiological criterion goes to the heart of the Salesian approach. We are not present in the lives of children and young people to condemn them. **We make ourselves available to offer them a healthy space of (ecclesial) communion, enlightened by the presence of a merciful God who places no conditions on anyone. We develop and communicate our various pastoral proposals precisely with this perspective of facilitating the encounter of young people with a spiritual proposal capable of enlightening the times in which they live, of offering them hope for the future.** The proposal of the person of Jesus Christ is not the result of sterile confessionalism or blind proselytism, but the discovery of a relationship with a person who offers unconditional love to all. Our testimony, and that of all those who live the educational and pastoral experience as **community**, is the most eloquent sign and the most credible message of the values we wish to communicate in order to share them - the **CHURCH**.

- iv. *The fourth model of the Church... it is necessary that the Church establish spiritual centres, places of adoration and contemplation, but also of encounter and dialogue, where it is possible to share the experience of faith. Many Christians are concerned that in a large number of countries the network of parishes, which was formed a few centuries ago in a completely different socio-cultural and pastoral situation and within a different interpretation of the Church's self, is fraying.*⁷

The fourth concept is that of a “**home**” capable of communicating **welcome, listening and accompaniment**. A “home” in which the human dimension of each individual's story is recognised and, at the same time, the possibility is offered to allow this humanity to reach its maturity. Don Bosco rightly calls “home” the place where the community lives its call because, by welcoming our children and young people, it is able to ensure the conditions and pastoral proposals necessary for this humanity to grow in an integral way. Each of our communities, each “house” or home is called to be a witness to the originality of the Valdocco experience: a “home” that intersects with the history of our young people, offering them a dignified future – the **HOME**.

In our Constitutions, Art. 40 *we find the synthesis of all these “four ecclesiological concepts”*. It is a synthesis that serves as an invitation and also as an encouragement for the present and the future of our educative and pastoral communities, of our provinces, of our beloved Salesian Congregation:

Don Bosco's Oratory a permanent criterion

Don Bosco lived a pastoral experience in his first Oratory which serves as a model; it was for the youngsters a home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves.

⁷ HALÍK, Tomáš, *Afternoon of Christianity*. (pp. 236-237).

As we carry out our mission today, the Valdocco experience is still the lasting criterion for discernment and renewal in all our activities and works.